

Care in Practice Framework:
**A framework to support career progression for the
social care workforce**

Guidance Document

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Who is this guidance for?

This guidance has been produced by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) to help policy makers and social care leaders understand the Care in Practice Framework (the CiP Framework).

Introduction

Social care is the largest registered workforce in the health and social care system in Northern Ireland. Social care is a regulated sector and all social care practitioners in Northern Ireland must be registered with the [Social Care Council](#) to work in social care. The Social Care Council regulates the workforce by maintaining a register and setting standards for conduct and practice and training for social workers, social work students and social care workers to ensure that the quality of care provided to people who use services is of a high standard.¹

Social care practitioners provide high quality, safe and effective social care practice across a diverse and complex range of needs. This is however dependent upon a valued and supported workforce, who are appropriately trained, skilled and rewarded for their work and the vital impact that it has on people's lives.

Our social care workforce vision:

A thriving, resilient values-based social care workforce continuously evolving to provide the best care and support to service users now and in the future.

Part of delivering this vision, has seen the Social Care Council, in partnership with the Department of Health and the social care sector, take forward for the first time in Northern Ireland **a Care in Practice Framework (the CiP Framework)**. The CiP Framework supports social care practitioners to develop professionally and create a thriving, resilient social care workforce continuously evolving to provide the best care and support to service users now and in the future.

The CiP Framework is a way to enable social care practitioners to engage and understand continuous learning and development using their practice experience, knowledge and skills in working to support service users increasingly those with complex needs across programmes of care within the health and social care system.

Outcomes of the CiP Framework

The CiP Framework will:

- support values-led practice and enable social care practitioners to meet their standards of conduct and practice
- place social care practitioners in charge of their own professional learning and development
- support them to develop their confidence in practice, skills, knowledge and expertise

¹ The [Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers](#) describe the values, attitudes and behaviours expected of social care practitioners in their day-to-day work and outlines the knowledge and skills required for safe and competent practice. They provide a baseline against which a social care practitioner's conduct and practice will be judged.

- support social care practitioners to continue to reflect, learn and develop throughout their careers
- recognise all work-related learning and development both formal qualifications and informal learning for example, reflective practice, coaching and mentoring, and
- provide transferability and flexibility across the sector.

The CiP Framework explained

There are two interlinked parts to the **CiP Framework**, a continuous professional learning pathway and a qualification pathway.

Continuous professional learning pathway

The continuous professional learning pathway is the ongoing improvement of integration of values and practice skills, competencies, capabilities and knowledge throughout a social care practitioners' career. The type and focus of this learning will vary depending on the work setting, nature of the role, learning needs and experience of the practitioner. The details will be agreed in an individualised learning and development plan that is reviewed and updated by the social care practitioner and their employer at regular intervals.

Learning is underpinned and supported by coaching and mentoring (this can be with peers and/or managers) and this can include:

- Life, work and learned experience.
- Having conversations, listening, observing, reading, questioning and reflecting.
- Attending in-house and other service specific training and workshops.
- Self-directed learning and research.
- Completing digital learning relevant to practice to supplement and complement employer training and development, for example, the Social Care Council's [Learning Zone](#) or the [Social Care Institute for Excellence \(SCIE\)](#) resources.
- Supervision/one-to-ones.
- Completing qualifications.

Social care qualification pathway

The social care qualification pathway outlines a range of qualifications that can be achieved from Level 2 upwards for social care practice, leadership and management.

It will include:²

- *Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice.*
- *Level 2 Diploma in Health and Social Care Northern Ireland.*
- *Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Northern Ireland)*
- *Level 4 Certificate in Principles of Leadership and Management in Adult Care.*
- *Level 4 Diploma in Adult Care (Northern Ireland).*

² Subject to review of qualifications – this list may develop. See Appendix 1 for more detail.

- *Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Health and Social Care (Adult Management or Adult Residential Management) Northern Ireland.*
- *Level 6 and 7 Higher Leadership/Management/Professional Qualifications.*

Social care registered managers are currently required to complete the *Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Health and Social Care* either the adult management pathway or the adult residential management pathway if they do not have one of the professional qualifications noted in the relevant Department of Health minimum standards.

It is important to note that currently there is **limited availability and opportunity** at Level 6 and 7 Higher Leadership Qualification level specific to social care. In order to further develop leadership and management opportunities for the social care workforce to meet the developing complexity of social care needs a high-level leadership and management qualifications at level 6 and 7 will be developed to meet these needs.

The CiP Framework is a flexible framework that social care practitioners can use to learn and develop in their role and areas of practice. Social care practitioners can utilise both CiP Framework pathways by completing qualifications and/or continuous professional learning both of which aim to ensure practitioners progress through their careers and continue to develop their skills, knowledge and practice.

What is changing?

There a number of changes that are being implemented to support the CIP Framework including:

Social care practitioner professional identity

To recognise the professional identity of the social care workforce the title of the social care practitioner is part of the CiP Framework. These have been introduced into the CiP Framework to better represent and promote **cohesion, identity** and to emphasise the **value** of the social care workforce. The following titles acknowledge the range of practice areas within social care:

- **Entrance Level Social Care Practitioner – learning and developing new skills.**
- **Social Care Practitioner – developing and consolidating new skills.**
- **Enhanced Social Care Practitioner – developing and enhancing skills.**
- **Social Care Leader/Manager.**

The CiP Framework has sufficient agility to support social care practitioners to practice and develop within their current role or grow into an enhanced role. Each role within social care will fall into one of these categories.

New entrance qualification: Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice

To support social care practitioners and the implementation of the CiP Framework there will be a new entrance qualification the *Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice* available from September 2024. This will be an entrance qualification for all new social care practitioners.

Establishing the Qualifications-based register

To reflect that the social care workforce is a “qualified” and professional workforce within the health and social care system a qualification based registered will be developed. The first step in developing a qualification based registered is to establish an entrance qualification applicable to new social care practitioners.

This involves collaborating with the social care sector to ensure all new staff complete the *Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice* – this is an employment-based qualification and will include practice assessment. Much like registered social workers it is intended that new registered social care practitioners will complete this qualification within six months of employment to be registered. This will drive up standards of practice and support employee induction.

The qualifications framework will be subject to periodic review to ensure the curriculums is fit for purpose.

Employer responsibilities and the CiP Framework

Employer responsibilities for learning and development of their employees are clearly outlined in the [Standards of Conduct and Practice for Employers](#) - Standard 4. These regulatory responsibilities apply across all parts of the CiP Framework.

The social care practitioner learning journey

There are a number of levels that a social care practitioner will reach as they travel through their learning journey as part of the CiP Framework and they will be supported by their employer.

a) [Entrance level social care practitioner – learning and developing new skills](#)

As part of the continuous professional learning and development journey, employers must provide a new social care practitioner with appropriate **induction** alongside supporting them to complete the **Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice**.

Employers should develop for their new staff member an individualised **Learning and Development Plan**. At this level continuous professional learning is captured as part of the induction and the learning and development planning process.

The entrance level qualification will ensure that a new social care practitioner has the required knowledge of the [Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers](#), underpinned by the supporting values below and as assessed in practice.

- Respecting the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.
- Working in a person-centred way.
- Treating people respectfully and with compassion.
- Supporting and promoting the independence and autonomy of service users.
- Acting in the best interests of service users and carers.
- Upholding and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Ensuring the care, you provide is safe and effective and of a high quality.³

³ Page 4 – Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers, 2015.

b) Social care practitioner – developing and consolidating new skills

As a social care practitioner once they have completed their induction which includes the **Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice** they will be required to continue to learn and develop their knowledge, skills and practice through continuous professional learning and/or qualifications. This develops their experience, knowledge and skills to improve their confidence, competence and capability to work in a person-centred way.

c) Enhanced social care practitioner – developing and enhancing skills

An enhanced social care practitioner will want to develop their experience, knowledge and skills to work with greater complexity or a particular programme of care for example: dementia, palliative care, challenging behaviour, autism, homelessness, trauma and/or they may want to develop core skills in leadership and management.

They could be a senior support worker, team leader or assistant/deputy manager and may have responsibility for staff management or supervision and also have responsibility for the following:

- Assessment and care planning.
- Safeguarding.
- Decision-making.
- Learning and development.
- Staff supervision and management.

d) Social care leader/Manager level

Social care leaders/managers should have access to opportunities to develop and attain higher level leadership and management training and qualifications similar to other professionals working in the health and social care system. This level of continuous professional development supports good practice in relation to the following:

- Governance.
- HSC Collective leadership strategy⁴
- NHS Healthcare Leadership Model ⁵
- DoH Learning and Improvement Strategy⁶
- Service and/or strategic accountability.
- Resource management.
- Quality assurance.
- Organisational and workforce development.
- Other professional learning and development/training.

⁴ [DOH, HSC Collective Leadership Strategy.](#)

⁵ [NHS Leadership Academy – Explore the Healthcare Leadership Model.](#)

⁶ [DoH Learning and Improvement Strategy](#)